

Mark Coulton MP

Member for Parkes | The Nationals Chief Whip

THE NATIONALS
for Regional Australia

Ref: bc/mc

Rural Affairs and Transport References Committee
Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Regional Australia
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Submission to Inquiry into the impact of the
Murray-Darling Basin Plan in Regional Australia

As the Federal Member for Parkes I welcome the opportunity to express my views on the management of the Murray-Darling Basin and in particular the impact of mining coal seam gas in the Basin.

The Parkes electorate covers over 256 000 sqkm of New South Wales and is entirely encapsulated within the Murray-Darling Basin. The Murray Darling Basin covers 14 percent of Australia, contains more than 40 percent of our farms and produces more than a third of our food. An estimated 85 percent of all irrigation in Australia takes place in the Murray-Darling Basin, which supports an agricultural industry worth more than \$9 billion per annum.

The presence of mining coal and coal seam gas exploration in the Parkes Electorate has increased in recent years. A large section of my electorate has been identified as containing either coal or coal seam gas resources. The potential for these resources is enormous. However, this needs to be balanced against the ongoing ability for this area to continue as a major food producer.

With the economic and social benefits that come to communities through mining activity in local areas, there is also the uncertainty of the risks associated with mining coal seam gas.

The Parkes Electorate communities of Bellata, Moree, Tooraweenah and Narrabri are facing significant exploration and development in coal seam gas. It is for this reason that I encourage the committee to hold a public meeting in New South Wales and in the communities of Narrabri and Tooraweenah.

Many primary producers in these areas have contacted me regarding their concerns about the mining of coal seam gas. These producers are concerned about issues regarding exploration on their properties. A major concern surrounds the impact of exploration and mining on water aquifers. There is much misinformation circulating in these communities, and that combined with a lack of reliable information is adding to growing anxiety.

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Primary producers in Tooraweenah, Moree, Narrabri and Bellata have been looking for factual information in order to make reasonable and educated decisions in relation to water management, agriculture and coal seam gas. For this reason I call for the inquiry to investigate the impact of coal seam gas exploration and extraction on the aquifers in the Murray Darling Basin and more specifically the Parkes electorate towns of Narrabri and Tooraweenah.

I believe it would be useful for this committee to fully investigate any links between mining and coal seam gas activities with any possible adverse effects on underground aquifers. I also believe that an inquiry into these areas would enable the resource companies a forum to explain the extent of their proposed activities as well as giving local farmers an opportunity to voice their concerns.

Kind Regards,

Mark Coulton MP
Federal Member for Parkes

29th June 2011